



U.S. AIR FORCE

## This Week in USAF and PACAF History 9 – 15 May 2011



9 May 1932 **First blind solo.** At Dayton, Ohio, Capt. Albert Hegenberger completed the first blind solo flight (on instruments alone) without even a check pilot aboard. Capt. Hegenberger, a graduate of MIT, used a radio direction finder to navigate an early version of an instrument approach over pre-positioned transmitters. By executing planned turns, approach legs and rates of descent as he followed the radio signals, Hegenberger landed without ever seeing the runway.

Of note: Lt. Hegenberger had previously made the first non-stop Mainland-to-Hawaii flight with Lt. Lester Maitland in 1927, a feat comparable to Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic. Hegenberger was stationed in Hawaii several times in the 1920s and 1930s. Brigadier General Hegenberger commanded the Seventh Bomber Command at Hickam Field until leaving for combat operations in the Far East in July, 1942.

12 May 1938 **Coastal Defense Demo.** Three B-17 crews intercepted the ocean liner *Rex* in the Atlantic Ocean 700 miles from U.S. shores, proving the potential of long-range bombers in coastal defense. Lt. Curtis LeMay was lead navigator for the flight and charged with finding the liner. (Photo at right of B-17s intercepting the *Rex*.)



13 May 1940 **First helicopter free flight.** Igor I. Sikorsky flew in his Vought-Sikorsky VS-300 helicopter (left) in its first truly free flight. Previous experimental flights had consisted of short, tethered hops. On 17 May 1942, Sikorsky's XR-4, flown by Sikorsky and Les Morris, landed at Wright Field, Ohio, to deliver the first Army Air Forces (AAF) helicopter.

15 May 1942 Interceptor and pursuit organizations of the AAF were **redesignated as "fighter"** units. The 15th Pursuit Group (Interceptor) was redesignated the 15th Fighter Group.

9 May 1944 **Enemy airbases depleted.** Eighth Air Force B-17s and B-24s bombed German airfields and radar stations to begin an offensive that would prevent the German Air Force from recovering before the Normandy invasion on D-Day. During this air battle, the Luftwaffe lost many of its most experienced fighter pilots, and those who returned to their bases found their runways damaged and often had to ditch their aircraft. Subsequently, the Luftwaffe mounted only a limited response to the invasion on 6 June.



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### **10 May 1944 Friendly airbases completed.**

Some 400,000 Chinese laborers completed the Chengdu Project, building five bomber bases and six fighter fields in China for U.S. B-29 air operations. The project had begun in January and used only primitive construction methods. In **Operation Matterhorn**, B-29s carried their own fuel, ordnance and other supplies from India over the Himalayas (photo at right) to the forward bases in China. Missions were flown from these bases against the Japanese in their home islands as well as Formosa, Singapore and other areas. Although the campaign had limited direct success against its assigned targets, the B-29 operations helped to rally the Chinese, demonstrated the vulnerability of Japan to strategic bombing, combat tested the B-29 and matured the B-29 force.



**11 May 1949** President Harry S. Truman signed a bill authorizing a 3,000-mile guided-missile test range for the Air Force, subsequently established at **Cape Canaveral**, Florida.

**12 May 1949 Berlin Blockade Ends.** Faced with the success of the Berlin airlift, the Soviet Union ended the land blockade of western Berlin. The airlift continued through September 30, building up stockpiles of food and coal in case of a renewed blockade.



T-28 in front of an O-1 Bird Dog

**17 May 1964 Operation Water Pump.** In March of 1964, Det 6 of the 1st Air Commando Wing had moved to Udorn Royal Thai AFB with four T-28s. Their mission was to train the Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF) for operations against the Pathet Lao. On 17 May, the RLAF began flying operational missions. On 18 May, the T-28s were painted with Laotian markings and turned over to the RLAF.

**12 – 14 May 1968 EVACUATION OF KHAM DUC.** Under extremely hostile conditions, C-130s helped evacuate Kham Duc, a special operations base for reconnaissance teams near Laos. USAF transports carried over 500 of the 1,800 military and civilians from Kham Duc before it fell to the enemy. The enemy killed 259 people and destroyed several aircraft.

**MEDAL OF HONOR.** Lt Col Joe M. Jackson volunteered to rescue a three-man USAF combat control team at **Kham Duc**. Enemy forces had already established gun positions on the airstrip and destroyed eight aircraft and. Despite the odds, Jackson and his crew (Maj Jesse Campbell, TSgt Edward M. Trejo, and SSgt Manson L. Grubbs) landed their C-123 under intense hostile fire, but were forced to take off. Making a second attempt, Jackson landed his C-123, extracted the combat controllers, and returned to safety. For his valiant effort, he received the Medal of Honor, the only airlifter so honored in the Vietnam conflict. Major Campbell received the Air Force Cross, while Sergeants Trejo and Grubbs earned Silver Stars.

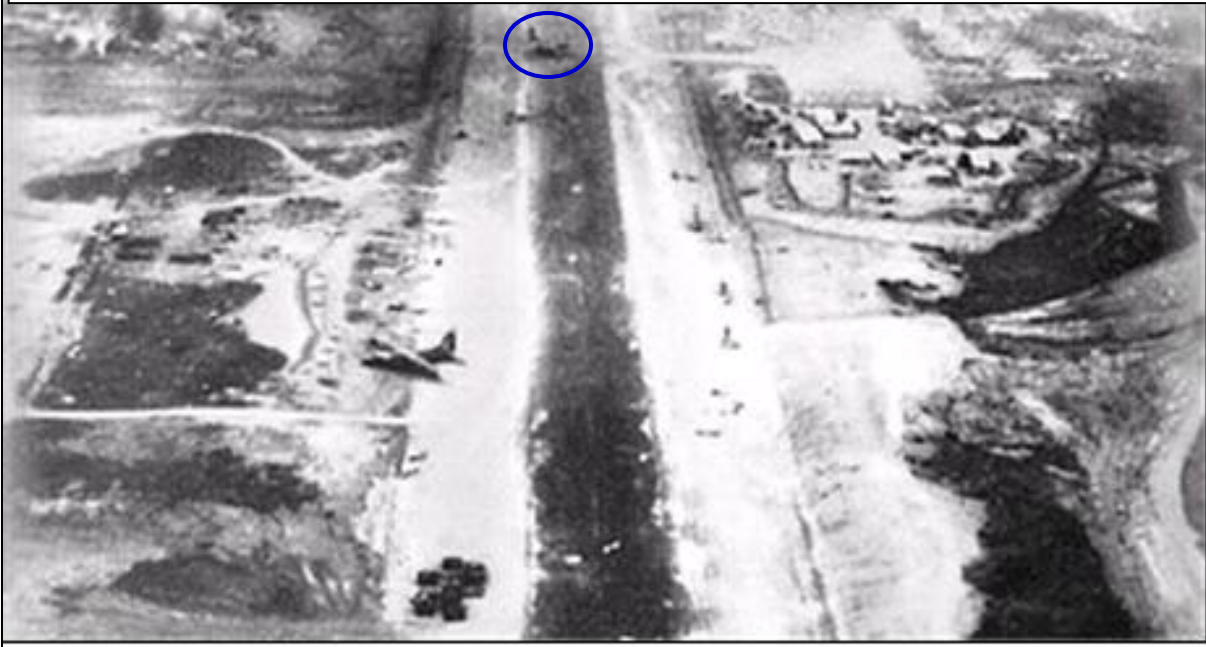


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Jackson's C-123 is at the top of the runway. Caption: "This is the only known photo of a Medal of Honor action taken while it was under way. Joe Jackson had just put his C-123 down to pick up three combat control team airmen. Jackson braved close-in enemy fire from both sides of the runway and from the hills above Kham Duc." See the October 2005 AF Magazine article, ["Rescue at Kham Duc."](#)



10-11 May 1972 **Doumer Bridge dropped.** Using guided bombs, F-4Ds of the 8th TFW finally dropped the Doumer Bridge. The first attempt to destroy this rail and highway bridge, a key enemy supply line to their forces in South Vietnam, took place on 3 April 1965.

12 May 1975 **USS Mayaguez Incident.** Cambodian forces hijacked this US merchant vessel in international waters near Koh Tang Island. Starting on 15 May, MAC used 16 C-141s on 30 sorties to airlift 1,165 Marines and 121 tons of cargo from the Philippines and Okinawa to Utapao AB, Thailand. The ARRS sent HH-53 helicopters (right) to fly the Marines to Koh Tang Island and to the USS Holt, and later picked them up. Cambodia returned the *Mayaguez* crew after Marines, supported by USAF helicopters and A-7s, captured the empty ship and assaulted Koh Tang Island, where the crew was mistakenly thought to have been taken. U.S. casualties totaled 15 killed in action, 3 MIA, and 49 wounded. Three PACAF CH-53s were lost, and three others were damaged, in the operation. Maj. Robert W. Undorf, an airborne forward air controller in an OV-10A Bronco, received the **Mackay Trophy** for conspicuous gallantry, initiative, and resourcefulness during this military operation—the last major American military action in Southeast Asia.

